



GSR in the Classroom: LENT

LESSON – LISTENING MORE DEEPLY DURING LENT

BEFORE YOU READ:

Take a moment to quiet yourself. As best you can, tune out any distractions from technology or other people (close your eyes if it helps). Then just listen. Listen for any sounds of nature, such as the chirping of birds, the buzzing of flies or the wind in the trees. Listen to your own breath. Appreciate the quiet, at least compared to normal, and praise God for being present with you.

Keep in mind while you read:

Be conscious of what you normally prefer to listen to, such as favorite types of music, agreeable people and favorable news. Also acknowledge things you generally tune out, such as negative news, opinions or people. Open your heart, mind and ears to listen to Jesus and the challenges to which God might call you.



PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CYCLONE IDAI WALK WITH THEIR BELONGINGS IN BEIRA, MOZAMBIQUE, MARCH 20. (CNS / CARE INTERNATIONAL VIA REUTERS / JOSH ESTEY)

LENT IS A TIME OF LISTENING

BY [NANCY SYLVESTER](#)

[April 15, 2019](#)

Listen ... You hear it at first very faintly. The chirp that signals the birds are returning, having escaped the cold of a Midwest winter. Not yet dawn, the conversation continues to get louder among the treetops. Once in a while, when I am lucky, an alcove outside my window is the chosen spot for a family. Its nest becomes the source of new life and new sounds.

Listen ... Spring is a time for listening ... morning dew sweating, leaves unfurling, earth rustling underfoot making room for new seeds. Perhaps it is no wonder that when Lent was placed on the calendar it hugged the

months considered spring in a broad part of the world. I sense Lent invites us to listen.

Listen ... Lent is a time of listening ...

We listen to the story of Jesus.

Listen to Jesus' life.

Jesus was a wisdom teacher wanting to speak through stories, metaphors and parables. If you heard only his words you did not really listen. His parables invite us to listen with a whole different consciousness. Jesus turned things upside down when he spoke about who belonged, what was fair, how we forgive. Jesus asks us to see from a sense of wholeness and a place of abundance, rather than from a sense of separation and a place of scarcity.

Listen to the silence as Jesus comes before Pontius Pilate.

That silence signals the fullness of Jesus' life. His silence holds his consistent living out of a vision of nonviolence, peace, compassion and love, which greatly threatened those in power. It is a silence of fullness. It spoke volumes as Pilate sensed that this man was not a criminal. Silence was the language of strength as Jesus stood ready to meet the consequences of having lived what he believed.

Listen to the words of Jesus on the cross.

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Simple words of forgiveness that continue to echo today, inviting us to embrace Jesus' radical vision. Words that are so difficult to utter. Too often, we hear ourselves say: Let them admit their guilt; they need to make **reparation**; they need to pay for what they have done; how can I forgive them.

We listen to what is happening in our world and on our planet.

Listen to those at the Mexican-U.S. border.

Thousands of women, men and children attempt to enter the United States seeking **asylum**. Their lives speak of their desire for freedom and safety. They leave their homes and families and risk everything to take this perilous journey to enter the United States. Most are willing to abide by law and to endure the years of waiting. It is worth it to them.

VOCABULARY

reparation: making of amends for a wrong that has been done by paying money to or helping those who have been wronged

asylum: legal permission to stay in the U.S. for protection because a person fears violence or persecution in their country

contemplative: focusing on spiritual things, especially an awareness of God's being

Listen to the cries of refugees.

Approximately 68.5 million people were driven from their homes across the world in 2017 due to war, violence and persecution, according to a report from the United Nations' refugee agency. They did not choose to leave. They were forcibly displaced. Neighboring countries set up camps for them and many are overflowing. Children are born and grow up in the camps. For many, there is no timeline for ever returning to their homeland.

Listen to the cries of our Earth home.

In recent years, our Earth has spoken strong words with wind and water. Cyclones and hurricanes deliver massive destruction and death. Here in the United States, major flooding has destroyed crops, animals and farmers' livelihoods in the Midwest. Storms are becoming more frequent and more intense. The Earth signals a future of greater weather shifts increasing the number of climate refugees throughout our world.

Lent is a time of listening ...

Listen to your self ...

Take time to listen to how you respond to what you just read. Listen but do not simply hear. Listen, rather, with a **contemplative** heart. Take time to pause and to listen in new ways. Sense how what you hear points to a deeper reality. Be aware of how what you hear is amplified in our lives, hinting at the future. Listen from your heart as an organ of knowing, offering you a space to pause and hear in new ways.

Take time to listen this Lent.



Nancy Sylvester, a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan, is founder and director of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue.

AFTER YOU READ:

As Sister Nancy Sylvester called you to more intentional ways of listening, what deeper realities did you discover about:

- the passion of Jesus?
- the struggles and conflicts in our world today?
- the future?

SCRIPTURE SPOTLIGHT: In the following excerpts from the gospel for the third Sunday of Lent, Jesus reaches outside the custom of his own culture and social norms by speaking with a Samaritan woman:

*“Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar,
near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
Jacob’s well was there.
Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well.
It was about noon.*

*A woman of Samaria came to draw water.
Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’
The Samaritan woman said to him,
‘How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?’
—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.—
Jesus answered and said to her,
‘If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you,
‘Give me a drink,’
you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’*

*The woman said to him,
‘Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep;
where then can you get this living water?
Are you greater than our father Jacob,
who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself
with his children and his flocks?’
Jesus answered and said to her,
‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;*

*but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst;
the water I shall give will become in him
a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’
The woman said to him,
‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty
or have to keep coming here to draw water.’*

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*At that moment his disciples returned,
and were amazed that he was talking with a woman,
but still no one said, ‘What are you looking for?’
or ‘Why are you talking with her?’
The woman left her water jar
and went into the town and said to the people,
‘Come see a man who told me everything I have done.
Could he possibly be the Christ?’*

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*Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him
because of the word of the woman who testified,
‘He told me everything I have done.’
When the Samaritans came to him,
they invited him to stay with them;
and he stayed there two days.
Many more began to believe in him because of his word,
and they said to the woman,
‘We no longer believe because of your word;
for we have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.’”*

Read the story in its entirety at: [John 4: 5-42](#)

Alone or with a partner, consider the following insights and questions:

- Which character in the story do you think represents you? Explain.
- How does Jesus show you how to value people over cultural norms, social norms and stereotyping?
- Why do you think Jesus reaches out to outcasts like the woman at the well?

THE CHURCH'S CALL

Pope Francis describes Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at a well and challenges us to think about our interior water jars.

"Today's Gospel presents Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman ... the outcome of that encounter by the well was the woman's transformation.... [E]very encounter with Jesus changes our lives, always. ... [W]e likewise find the impetus to 'leave behind our water jar,' the symbol of everything that is seemingly important, but loses all its value before the 'love of God.' We all have one, or more than one! I ask you, and myself: 'What is your interior water jar, the one that weighs you down, that distances you from God? Let us set it aside a little and with our hearts; let us hear the voice of Jesus offering us another kind of water, another water that brings us close to the Lord.

We are called to rediscover the importance and the sense of our Christian life, initiated in Baptism and, like the Samaritan woman, to witness to our brothers. A witness of what? Joy! To witness to the joy of the encounter with Jesus; for, as I said, every encounter with Jesus changes our life, and every encounter with Jesus also fills us with joy, the joy that comes from within. And the Lord is like this. And so we must tell of the marvelous things the Lord can do in our hearts when we have the courage to set aside our own water jar."

[Pope Francis, March 23, 2014](#)

Reflection Questions:

- What is your interior water jar, the one that weighs you down, that distances you from God?
- How does the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman affect both their lives?
- How might encounters with Jesus, who you can discover in the struggles of today's outcasts, have an impact in your life?
- How is Jesus calling you to be his witness today?

SYNERGY WITH SISTERS

Sister Nancy Sylvester encourages us to listen with a contemplative heart this Lent. The Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue, which she founded, promotes a practice called "contemplative sitting." This simply means sitting for about 20 minutes each day, clearing your mind of your everyday thoughts and opening yourself to the presence of God.

You can join with more than 900 people around the world in the "Contemplative Sitting Network" or just learn more about the practice and its purpose [here](#) (scroll to the bottom of the webpage for a how-to).



ACT

1. Drawing from Sister Nancy Sylvester's words, learn how to listen and to discover the way Jesus' sees the world. End your day with this video: [The Art of Examen: Learning](#).
2. What's in your personal water jar? Is it filled with burdens that you long to leave behind?

Find a simple jar. Each night, write on a small slip of paper a burden that you ache to leave behind. Pray this simple prayer as you cast your burden into the jar: *"God, free me from the burdens that prevent me from being true to myself and from welcoming you into my life."*
3. For one week, take a 40-minute daily fast from technology. For seven days, briefly silence your cell phone and turn off your computer every day. During this time, explore ways to listen to God or talk with a family member, an elderly neighbor or a friend who is struggling with worries or depression.

PRAY

Jesus,
You lifted the burdens of the Samaritan woman.
Show us how to ease the sufferings of your people.
For the oppressed and the oppressor, lift their burdens.
For the abused and abuser, lift their burdens.
For the trafficked and the trafficker, lift their burdens.
For the addict and the drug dealer, lift their burdens.
For the poor and the rich, lift their burdens.
For the advocate and the bystander, lift their burdens.
For the peacemaker and the warmonger, lift their burdens.
For the progressive and the conservative, lift their burdens.
May we be your burden-lifters and lift each other's burdens despite our many differences.
Amen.

